

The Annapolis Times

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Miracle City Church '100,000 Touches' Campaign Sparks Community Service



Miracle City Church launched a "100,000 Touches" Campaign January 30, 2016. The goal of the campaign is to serve 100,000 people in Baltimore over a one-year time frame. On Saturday, March 12, 2016 members of Miracle City joined 12 other area churches and community leaders to participate in Unity Day, a day of community service projects around the city and a worship event that focused on ending violence in Baltimore. (Above): Reverend David Franklin, the pastor of the church located, on South Rock Glen Road in Baltimore leads a worship service. (See article on page 10)

Courtesy Photo

Eastern Shore Folklife Festival at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum

Baltimore— The public is invited to join the Reginald F. Lewis Museum for a day full of activities and presentations celebrating the culture of Maryland's Eastern Shore region on Saturday, March 19, 2016 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Activities include presentations from acclaimed chef and food writer, John Shields, owner of Gertrude's at the Baltimore Museum of Art, for a talk on Chesapeake regional cooking along with a food tasting; a performance by the Singing and Praying Band of Maryland and Delaware, named a 2014 National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment of the Arts; a film screening of *Voices of Indiantown* followed by a discussion with the descendants of the families of sharecroppers growing up in rural Dorchester County; and a reading of *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by children's author Carole Boston Weatherford. The festival is in conjunction with the exhibition *Ruth Starr Rose: Revelations of African American Life in Maryland and the World*.



The Singing and Praying Band of Maryland and Delaware will perform at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 19, 2016 during the Eastern Shore Folklife Festival at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum located at 830 East Pratt Street in Baltimore City. For more information, visit: www.lewismuseum.org.

Eastern Shore Folklife Festival Event Schedule:

- 1:00 p.m. — Voices of Indiantown Film Screening and Discussion with Eastern Shore descendants of sharecroppers*
- 1:30 p.m. — Storytelling with children's author Carol Boston Weatherford of Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*
- 2:00 p.m. — Food Conversations and tasting with Chef and Food Writer John Shields*
- 3:30 p.m. — Musical Presentation by the Singing and Praying Band of Maryland and Delaware*

Send your community calendar events to: kreevie@btimes.com

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Underage Drinking Town Hall Meeting

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There are more than 4,500 deaths per-year due to excessive alcohol use among youth ages 12 – 20 (CDC, 2012)

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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Before You Reject System, Understand It

By Lee H. Hamilton

If there is a theme that sets this political season apart, it's the voters' utter disdain for most of the people who practice politics. They're fed up with politicians, they've lost faith and confidence in the political elite and they don't believe that the realm where politicians ply their craft—government—works.

The two presidential contenders who have most channeled this frustration, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, have electrified many voters who want to get this message across. They've mobilized new voters, people more mainstream politicians haven't reached. The involvement of more Americans in the political system, though it unsettles the old order, is bracing.

There are many legitimate reasons for these people to be turned off by the political system today. However, I'd argue if you're hell-bent on shaking up the system you also need to understand it—and understand that certain features are likely to persist no matter how hard you try to change them.

The first is that it is very hard to make our representative democracy work. We make progress incrementally, over years if not generations. The first president to press hard for affordable, accessible health care was Harry Truman. It's taken us that long even to get close—and no one would argue that the work is done.

So you have to approach politics with great patience. Our system discourages the rush to judgment—it puts a premium on including as many voices as possible, which takes time in a complicated country. The process is inevitably slow, noisy and messy, the results fully satisfy no one, and more often than not the best we can do is to muddle through.

Which is why in our system, there is rarely a sense of completion. The work—on health care, taxes, the environment, you name it—is never done. Nothing is ever finally settled. There is no ultimate solution.

Many people are also turned off by what lies at the center of our system: deal-making. This involves a clash of ideas in the public arena, compromise, and negotiation, which make a lot of Americans uneasy. Yet it's how we resolve our differences—and has been since the first day of the United States' existence.

So politicians who insist on purity impede solutions. There ought to be a healthy tension between idealism and realism, but we have to find a pragmatic way to combine them. This makes it challenging to come to an agreement on complicated issues, but it's necessary to keep the country from coming apart.

Congress in recent years has reached new levels of polarization and failure to address the major issues of the day. In public meetings, I often encounter a yearning for leadership to solve all our problems, usually along the lines of, "Where are the Abe Lincolns of our day?" Sadly, it's a false hope. Our problems are made by us and have to be resolved by us. Abraham Lincoln's not around any more.

We cannot look to government to solve all our problems. Indeed, we live in an era in which government faces more and more problems it cannot effectively deal with. Increasingly, citizens have to step forward and fill the void that government leaves. The relevance of the citizen increases every day as power is more diffuse, technology empowers individuals, and social media allows more citizens to express their views, vent their frustrations, and to mobilize organizations.

Our communities and lives are better because of citizen action. Indeed, unless citizens boost their involvement and contributions, many of our problems will not be solved.

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar, IU School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice, IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER
(WHO'S GOING NOWHERE)



Community Affairs

Maryland Taxpayers urged to E-File for Quick Refunds

Annapolis— With the tax-filing deadline a month away, Comptroller Peter Franchot encourages taxpayers who have yet to file to take advantage of all the conveniences of electronic filing. This year, taxpayers have three extra days to file; the deadline is April 18 due to Emancipation Day celebrations in Washington, D.C., on April 15.

"The best way to ensure a quick refund is to file electronically," Comptroller Franchot said. "Filing electronically also allows taxpayers who owe money to delay payment until April 30."

To date, more than 1.29 million taxpayers have filed their personal tax returns electronically with more than 90,000 filing via paper. Based on 3.04 million returns filed last year, the returns filed so far represent 45 percent of last year's total.

Marylanders are urged to file electronically to ensure they receive their refund within days as opposed to weeks, as more than 1.29 million taxpayers already have taken his advice. To date, refund payments of more than \$1 billion have been issued to more than one million taxpayers.

Comptroller Franchot also asks taxpayers to review their returns carefully before filing, as simple mistakes can significantly slow down the processing of a tax return and refund. To ensure an accurate return, taxpayers should remember to: check Social Security numbers; verify bank account (checking/saving) and routing numbers for direct deposit refunds and direct debit payments; double-check calculations; and include all pertinent information including relevant forms and documents, such as the W-2 form.

Although electronic filing is strongly preferred, taxpayers filing paper returns should follow all the tips provided above, as well as remember to: write legibly or type; use a pen; and sign the tax return.

Electronic filing saves the state significant money in processing costs. Each paper return costs the state more than \$2 to process, compared to 19 cents for e-filed returns resulting in savings of millions of dollars each year.

Free state tax assistance is available at all of the agency's 12 taxpayer service offices, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For branch location information, visit: www.marylandtaxes.com.

Despite Low Scores, New Standardized Tests Deserve Attention

By Alan Shusterman

Students across the country are increasingly failing a new type of standardized test.

Kids in New Jersey are performing below grade level in English and math. In Washington, D.C., the tests have revealed that only a quarter of students are "on-track for college." In Arizona, two-thirds of students flunked.

Yet, despite these dismal results, there is some cause for celebration.

These new types of exams, called "problem-and-technology-based" assessments, measure how students arrive at an answer— not whether they've filled in the correct bubble. They aim to provide honest portraits of students' progress.

Unfortunately, those portraits have been anything but pretty. But that's okay. Problem-and-technology-based assessments test students on skills that actually matter in real life— like critical thinking and reasoning. Schools should double-down on this approach— and figure out

how to meet the challenges it poses, rather than continuing along with the testing status quo.

Parents, school administrators and teachers have become exasperated by standardized tests in recent years— and understandably so. A recent study of the nation's biggest school districts found that the average public-school student takes 112 standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and the end of high

ministrators everywhere from Georgia to New Jersey. That's thanks, in large part, to strict federal laws that punish school officials for failing to meet test-score requirements.

These reverse incentives— along with the dismal student outcomes they've engendered -- are among the chief reasons Congress recently voted to repeal the most wide-ranging of these laws, No Child Left Behind.

traditional multiple-choice standardized tests, which often reward rote memorization. But memorization doesn't necessarily reflect whether a student has actually learned or understands the material.

Problem-and-technology-based assessments, by contrast, ask students to apply critical-thinking and reasoning skills, mainly through written answers. These are exactly the skills that students need for success after school.

It's also impossible for educators to "teach to the test" when that test is problem-and-technology-based. The only way to prepare students is to develop their problem-solving, critical-thinking and reasoning skills— and then to teach them to apply those skills.

Finally, problem-and-technology-based evaluations greatly reduce the likelihood of cheating. Since students must do more than merely choose the correct answer, it's nearly impossible for kids to copy off their neighbors— or for a teacher to "signal" the right response during testing.

Students around the country may be underperforming on these new problem-and-technology-based tests. But for the first time in decades, standardized exams are aiming to test things that matter— and pushing students and their teachers to actually learn the skills that will help them succeed.

Alan Shusterman is Founder and Head of School for Tomorrow (SFT) with campuses in Silver Spring, Maryland; and Reston, Virginia.

“Parents, school administrators and teachers have become exasperated by standardized tests in recent years— and understandably so. A recent study of the nation's biggest school districts found that the average public school student takes 112 standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and the end of high school. Eighth graders spend over 25 hours submitting to these exams.”

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This litany of tests has done little to raise student achievement. In the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, the so-called "Nation's Report Card," math scores for fourth- and eighth-graders actually fell for the first time in the test's 35-year history.

Worse, a growing obsession with boosting test scores at all costs has led to waves of cheating by teachers and ad-

The replacement bill that President Obama signed into law in December awards new freedom to states to organize their education systems as they see fit.

Test-weary school systems in search of more constructive ways of evaluating student performance should look toward problem-and-technology based assessments.

For starters, these assessments provide more value to students and teachers than

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Black Girls Vote Seeks to Get Women to Polls

By Stacy M. Brown

According to Nykidra Robinson, black women are the matriarchs of the African American family and when they lead, undoubtedly black men and their children will follow.

Robinson, a Baltimore resident whom friends describe as a visionary and motivator with a heart for people and a passion to change the world, is pushing black women to use their vast influence at the polls.

“We can’t sit back and make excuses,” Robinson said. “Our vote is our voice and it doesn’t matter if you don’t have a GED, or if you have a PhD, we’re all the same.”

Robinson started “Black Girls Vote,” a grassroots and nonpartisan organization created to represent the national and international concerns of women of color. She says they are dedicated to using their collective voice to transform areas where bias has the most profound impact on the lives of black women.

“It’s important for us to vote and it’s more important to do so as a unit because that’s where we wield the most power,” Robinson said. “Black Girls Vote is a factual statement. We have a higher voting rate than any demographic, so this is a call to action.”

During the last Baltimore City Mayoral Election in 2011, nearly 60 percent of eligible voters were women but only half of them voted, according to local statistics.

More than 400,000 black women and

2.2 million women of color have joined the eligible voting population since 2012, according to the Center for American Progress.

“Our vote is our voice and we don’t want to lose that voice. Policy impacts our lives everyday so things that we are not content with can only change when we participate in the voting process regardless of our beliefs or religion,” Robinson said.

Black Girls Vote has placed specific importance on 18 to 25 year olds, and the organization is also encouraging registered voters to vote in the primary and general election while also promoting the early voting options resident of Baltimore have, according to Robinson.

“Our mission is to inspire a community of women to use the democratic process to address issues that impact women of color,” Robinson said.

To help further its mission, Black Girls Vote will host a “Mayoral Job Interview and Expo” from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday, March 21, 2016 at Western High School located at 4600 Falls Road in Baltimore.

Robinson selected TV & Radio Personality Jeff Johnson to host the event in which she’s invited each of the candidates for mayor to attend and be interviewed by voters.

She called the city a big business with a \$3.2 billion budget, requiring that the next mayor—the city’s CEO—be interviewed.

“With the power of our vote, we can tell any candidate that we can get you



Nykidra Robinson
 Founder, Black Girls Vote
 Courtesy Photo

there and we can keep you there,” said Robinson, a Frostburg State University graduate who has worked in both local and state government and has served as a neighborhood liaison in the mayor’s office, an outreach coordinator in the Lt. Governor’s office and as special assistant to the director of the Department of Housing and Community Development.

“Black women are voting. We are tired and we are more aware so this is a united front,” Robinson said. “It’s important that candidates have ideas because we are not going to stand on the sideline and complain, we are going to the polls and vote.”

To learn more about Black Girls Vote or to make a donation to the organization, visit: www.blackgirlsvote.com. The organization is also seeking volunteers, ambassadors, subject matter experts and boots on the ground. For additional information, email: info@black-girlsvote.com.

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Eric Weddle brings discipline to Ravens secondary

By Turron Davenport

The Baltimore Ravens signed free safety Eric Weddle to a four-year contract worth \$26 million. The deal includes a \$7 million signing bonus and guarantees Weddle \$13 million. His average annual salary is \$6.5 million.

Typically, Ravens General Manager Ozzie Newsome does not award free agents this kind of money. The Ravens had to find a way to be more disciplined on the back end. They gave up far too many big plays to opposing offenses.

Weddle is one of the best safeties in the NFL. He rarely gets beaten deep because he is very disciplined. Unlike last year's starter Will Hill, Weddle won't be fooled by combination routes designed to get receivers open down the field.

The Ravens have lacked a true ball hawk at safety for years. The days of Ed Reed roaming the secondary were replaced by a series of failed low priced free agent safeties.

The defense struggled to create

turnovers. Weddle has 19 career interceptions and 71 pass break ups. It is pretty clear that he knows how to find the football.

Expect the Ravens to register more sacks and interceptions in 2016. Their defense will be much better.

It won't take long for Weddle to get settled in at Owings Mills. The Ravens locker room is very accepting of veteran players. Head Coach John Harbaugh welcomes veterans to be leaders on the team especially ones like Weddle who let their work ethic speak for itself.

Weddle and Steve Smith Sr. are good friends as well. In fact, it was Weddle who tried to get Smith to come to San Diego when he was a free agent.

Smith has become a fan favorite after only two seasons in Baltimore. Weddle has a good chance to do the same.



Former San Diego Chargers safety Eric Weddle watches a game from the sidelines during the 2015 NFL season. Courtesy Photo/NFL.com

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Seven Last Words of Christ Worship Service

The S.E.E.D. Church located at 400 East 31st Street in Baltimore will host an early and late "Seven Last Words of Christ Worship Service at 8 a.m. and at 7 p.m. on Good Friday, March 25, 2016. Worship service begins at 10 a.m. every Sunday.

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Author/Publicist Cherrie Woods Shares 10 Key PR Tips in New Book

Baltimore—Self-published authors need the tools to compete in today's saturated book market and public relations expert Cherrie Woods' eagerly anticipated debut book "Where Do I Start? 10 PR Questions and Answers to Guide Self-Published Authors" fills the expertise gap for self-published authors.

Traditionally published authors have the support of their publisher's staff to market their book however self-published authors, usually with no public relations expertise or budget; can find themselves in a quagmire when having to do their own marketing. Cherrie Woods offers 10 secret tips to lead self-published authors to success.

Woods, a fixture within the literary community, wrote "Where Do I Start?" based on frequently asked questions asked of her during her seminars, media appearances and consultations with budding authors. The book focuses on 10 key questions and answers along with pertinent PR information to give authors the competitive edge.

According to author Sheri Booker, "Writers owe it to themselves to make sure their book is visible. The best way to do that is to include marketing and PR in your budget from the very start."

"Most self-published authors don't want to read long books on the theory and practice of book publicity. They want to hit the ground running and often do. Unfortunately, most of the running tends to be in the wrong direction with no compass to guide them. My book is that compass," says Woods.

Woods is a 15-year PR veteran who has done freelance work with visual artists, small businesses and nonprofits, and since 2010 with a variety of authors. She created the "Promoting Your Own Book" workshop, which later evolved into the book, Where Do I Start? 10 PR Questions and Answers to Guide Self-

CHERRIE WOODS

Where Do I Start?

**10 PR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
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Published Authors, after receiving positive feedback from numerous audiences. This book is quick read that's full of valuable information for authors who desire to learn the basics of doing their own public relations.

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Miracle City Church '100,000 Touches' Campaign Sparks Community Service

By Stacy M. Brown

It's been happening since January 30, 2016.

A Baltimore resident pulls into a gas station, perhaps with just enough cash for a little gasoline in hopes of being able to drive a few miles further. Instead, a good Samaritan from Miracle City Church emerges to pay for a full tank.

A family carrying around laundry for weeks, washing a small load at a time because money is scarce and it's become impossible to clean all of their clothes at once.

Again, a Miracle City Church volunteer happens upon the scene, paying for all of the clothing to be washed to the delight of that family.

"On January 30, our church launched a '100,000 Touches' campaign, a yearlong service campaign where we are seeking to serve 100,000 people in the city over a one-year time frame," said Rev. David Franklin, the pastor of the church, of the Seventh Day Adventist faith, on South Rock Glen Road in Baltimore. "We started that day with service projects asking people to show up at 8 a.m. To date we've served over 5,000 people in the city, feeding the homeless, paying for people's gas, paying for their groceries, going into laundromats and providing free loads to people, and going into nursing homes providing assistance there."

On Saturday, March 12, 2016 members of Miracle City joined 12 other area churches and community leaders to participate in Unity Day, a day of community service projects around the city and a worship event that focused on ending violence in Baltimore.

"Thirteen area churches come together once a year to worship and fellowship but this year was somewhat inspired by the work here at Miracle," Franklin said. "We had 90 plus volunteers shows up at 8 a.m. at Berea Temple and we served 857 people through various projects through our city. I'm ecstatic and that's awesome. Two weeks before that we had 200 people show up and serve 1,500 at the church so the buzz is growing and people are getting excited about serving."

On Saturday, March 19, 2016, church members plan to kick off a cleanup weekend where they will host projects that Franklin said will have a longer view toward sustainable impact projects and programs.

Franklin says they will clean a three to four block radius beginning near Collins Street.

Church members will also have food and water available for the homeless and anyone else who want to just talk. Also, volunteers will head to the Baltimore Health Expo downtown where, in 2015, more than 30,000 visited the expo with many seeking information about how to improve their health.

The church is expected to have a booth at the expo where they'll provide health information.

"Miracle City Church's re-launch is about becoming an outreach-focused church. We want to reach out to



Rev. David Franklin leads worship service at Miracle City Church. Courtesy Photos



Rev. Franklin connects with three little girls in laundromat during Loads of Love outreach.



Donnell and Denise Josiah pray during homeless outreach.



Cameka Bernard hands out scarves and gloves during winter in Baltimore.

the community in relevant ways which results in people choosing to live the miracle of life in Jesus Christ," Franklin said. "In general, we will focus on service projects that do good for the sake of doing good— or what we call disinterested benevolence. We want to give and serve without expecting anything in return."

The goal of 100,000 touches in 365 days is off to an excellent start, Franklin said, noting that 30,000 touches in the first 30 days are tangible goals that give energy, focus, and a measurable outcome for the entire church to rally around.

"As pastor, the blessing for me is to see people awakened to the joy of service and realize the significant impact that can be had when you step outside the four walls of the church," Franklin said. "The church was never to be a building but four walls of the community."



Thai Heaven provided hot soup for Miracle City homeless outreach.

Outstanding youth recognized at 'She Matters & He Matters' Award Ceremony

By Andrea Blackstone

Opportunities to formally hear good news about young people are rare. However, Kendra Randall Jolivet and Yolanda F. Sonnier are helping to bridge the gap by highlighting stellar young ladies and young men through the "She Matters & He Matters Awards," created in 2008 and 2010, to celebrate the accomplishments of young people. Each year, boys between the ages of seven to 17; girls ages nine to 18 and two adults who are helping the community and youth are recognized.

The creation of the awards is rooted in Jolivet and Sonnier's shared vision to create a nonprofit called A Step Closer Foundation, Inc. (ASCF, Inc.). The attorneys who have been partners in Randall & Sonnier, LLC for 15 years representing children in abuse and neglect cases in the Baltimore area wanted to take children a step closer to their destiny.

On March 13, 2016, at The Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in Laurel, Maryland, 24 young people and two adults were honored at ASCF, Inc.'s ninth annual She Matters & He Matters Award Ceremony in the categories of academics, community service, athletics, entrepreneurial spirit and character and achievement.

The 2016, She Matters honorees include: Varia Alston; Imari Cooper; Kendel Abrams; Gabrielle Carter; Ariona Mayo; Terise Smith; Alexis Hiatt; Martesha Smith; Alejandra Stack; and Zandra Cunningham. NyGuel Jones; Talon Cooper; Tarance Cousar Jr.; Jeremiah Boyd; Justin Marrow; Jaaron Alston; Iyinde Palmer; Tymon Johnson; Brett Burch; and Aaron Johnson were this year's He Matters honorees. Isaiah Jolivet; Nia Jolivet; Erin Dixon and Allen Dixon were surprise awardees recognized for character and achievement. Participating youth were nominated by parents, teachers, coaches and churches.

Sandi Mallory, WEAA's Director of Public Service and Community Engagement and host of "Cool Vibes for Your Midday" and "The Neo Soul Café," was honored as She Matters Shero of the Year. Elder Dwight Parker, assistant pastor of Set The Captives Free Outreach Center, and founder of a faith-based mentoring program for males called Operation Timothy, was honored as He Matters Hero of the Year.

The unique ceremony highlighted talented youth from Baltimore, the District of Columbia and other U.S. locations. Seventeen-year-old Jaaron, a Baltimorean who received the He Matters Bell-Turpin Community Service Award, was among them. He has been dedicated to community service since he was approximately nine years old. As a member of an organization called the New Horizons Men and Women Squires' Club, Jaaron has participated in neighborhood street clean-ups, canned food drives and other activities.



Outstanding youth and adult recipients of the She Matters & He Matters Award Ceremony were recognized at the 2016 She Matters & He Matters Awards Ceremony that was held on March 13, 2016. Led by attorneys Yolanda F. Sonnier and Kendra Randall Jolivet, A Step Closer Foundation, Inc. highlights exemplary accomplishments of youth and adults. Keith Penn-Jones, the CEO and founder of the Penn-Jones Group, served as this year's keynote speaker. Photos: Andrea Blackstone

"I worked around my church cleaning, helping elderly, feeding the homeless and also giving them clothing," Jaaron said. "It feels really exciting to be honored for what I've been doing, although I'm in it for the rewards."

Jaaron's sister, Varia is a sixth grader student who received a She Matters Jean A. Sonnier Academic Accomplishment Award. Varia's aspires to maintain perfect attendance and graduate with honors from high school.

Zandra Cunningham, who received a She Matters Entrepreneurial Spirit Award, traveled from Buffalo, N.Y to participate. The teenage entrepreneur and speaker started her eco-friendly small business, the Zandra brand, by making lip balms and whipped shea body butters when she was just nine.

Fifteen-year-old Aaron from Miami, Florida, was selected to receive an entrepreneurial spirit award. His company has produced commercials and music videos for businesses, organizations, schools and performers. The author, motivational speaker, award-winning filmmaker and talk show host is currently on his "You Are Never Too Young" book tour. Aaron said that he intends to inspire younger entrepreneurs or younger kids to own their own business. In 2015, the impressive honor roll student received the McDonald's 365Black Community Choice Youth award.

Aaron explained that his entrepreneurial journey began at the age of nine when his parents brought home a laptop. He said that in less than 24 hours, he made a commercial by using software that was new to him. From then on he knew filmmaking was something



L-r: Jaaron Alston and and Varia Alston. The brother and sister from Baltimore were honored at the 2016 She Matters & He Matters Awards. They were among 26 youth and two adults from the around the country who received awards at the annual event on March 13, 2016 in Laurel, Maryland.

that he needed to do. Aaron remains on a mission to achieve big goals. He offered advice for young people who have ideas but are unsure if they should pursue them.

"I always say everybody has their niche. Everybody has a certain talent or ability that you can use to pretty much blow it up as big as you can. You know, make it your brand," Aaron said. "So I would say just keep on going, keep on motivating and keep on being inspiring!"

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Presents Circus XTREME

By Andrea Blackstone

Brooklyn native Brian Wright, 23, knows firsthand that a dream career can be attainable, if a person is driven to follow his or her passion. Wright was four when he attended his first Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden and was impressed by the clowns. While still very young, he informed his parents that he wanted to become a clown who worked for 'The Greatest Show on Earth.'

That is exactly what Wright has been doing in Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Presents Circus XTREME for the last three years. The show will be held at the Royal Farms Arena in Baltimore until March 27, 2016.

Ironically, Wright was told that his dream was a cute phase that he would eventually outgrow. However, returning to see a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show, after he stopped going for approximately five years, marked a life-changing time when the 17-year-old realized that clowning was his true desire. Wright dared to take a leap of faith, upon graduating from Philippa Schuyler School for the Gifted and Talented and Brooklyn High School of the Arts.

"When I got out of high school, I pursued clowning on the amateur circuit. I would just do my own make-up and go to parties. I was told that performing was the best way to get experience, but then after maybe about a year of doing that, I found Mooseburger Clown Arts Camp," Wright said, recalling his training that began in 2011. "It's a clown camp in Minnesota. It's a week-long program that runs every summer, and I went there two separate summers in between auditioning for Ringling Bros., and I credit them and all of those great teachers there for teaching me a lot of the stuff that I know now."

Wright landed a coveted Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey clown spot, after driving 17 hours to St. Louis, Missouri for a third audition. He says that the people who once described his career aspiration as a cute phase were ecstatic that he made it to perform under the big-top.



Brian Wright is a Brooklyn native who aspired to become a clown since he was a little boy. More than 100 world-renown artists like Wright redefine the word extreme in everything they do, while magnifying traditional elements of the circus combined with never-before-seen spectacles appear in Circus XTREME at the Royal Farms Arena in Baltimore from March 16-27, 2016. Circus XTREME will be performing at two additional arenas in the Greater Washington, D.C. area—the Verizon Center from March 31-April 3, and the Eagle Bank Arena in Fairfax, Virginia from April 6-17. Courtesy Photos

"I wanted to be at least somebody who said that they wanted to do something and went out and did it because I can't see myself doing any other job, and if I did do any other job, I probably wouldn't be happy. And I don't care how much money you make, money doesn't make you happy," Wright said, explaining that no other person in his family opted to follow their dream.

Wright now travels around the country being paid to touch the hearts of everyone from little kids to elderly people who come to see Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus XTREME.

"We take these two words, circus, which you've got the elephants, the tigers and of course you've got the

clowns of the traditional circus, and then you take this word, "XTREME" and we take the two of them and mesh them together so perfectly that we have the tigers, but there are 16 of them in one cage at one time. We have the clowns, but they are competing to climb a mountain. I mean it's insane," Wright said. "We take [the] classic circus and just bump it up to the max."

Audiences can also see beautiful Bengal tigers, double-humped dromedaries that are ridden by brave Mongolian women and, for a final time, the magnificent Asian elephants. The All Access Pre-show, which begins one hour before the show, is Wright's favorite aspect of Circus XTREME.

"It is free with your admission as long as you have a ticket. Anybody in the audience can come down to the arena floor. They can meet me, and the rest of clowns. They can see an elephant paint right in front of their eyes and just see something you won't be able to see in the show itself, so that for me is my favorite part."

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Presents Circus XTREME, will also at the Verizon Center in the District of Columbia from March 31-April 3, and the Eagle Bank Arena in Fairfax, Virginia from April 6-17. Tickets may be purchased at all Ticketmaster outlets, by calling 1-800-745-3000, or by visiting www.ticketmaster.com.



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Historic St. James' Episcopal Church, Churches of Lafayette Square to conduct Annual Blessing of City on Palm Sunday

Baltimore— Political leaders in Baltimore will join the community and churches in Lafayette Square for the 13th Annual Blessing of the City on Sunday, March 20, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at Lafayette Square Park bordered by West Lafayette Avenue; North Arlington Street; West Lanvale Street; and North Carrollton Street in Baltimore City.

The ecumenical Palm Sunday event will include young people from these churches who will offer prayers for those who lead our great city, the issues facing our city and the people who live here.

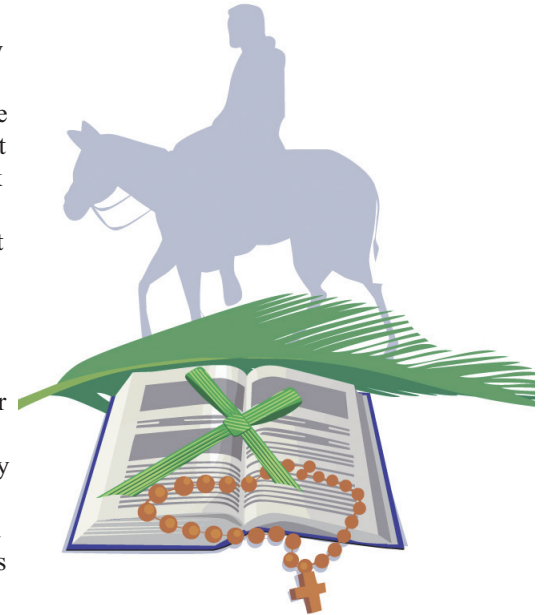
Lafayette Square was established in West Baltimore in 1860 and was occupied during the Civil War as Camp Hoffman for Union troops.

Many historic mansions of architectural significance are part of the fabric of the Lafayette Square community. It's the only public square in the city with five churches— four built in the 19th century.

The participating churches are: Enon Baptist Church; Greater Hope Church of God In Christ; Macedonia Baptist Church; Metropolitan United Methodist Church; St. James' Episcopal Church; and St. John's A.M.E. Church.

In recent years, the Blessing of the City was held in front of City Hall. However, due to the death of Freddie Gray and the resulting aftermath, which included unrest and riots in Sandtown Winchester and Upton/Druid Heights communities, just blocks away from the Lafayette Square Churches, Father Robinson, of St. James Episcopal Church, concluded that this year, the Blessing of the City should occur in Lafayette Square. Consequently, the community can be engaged in the prayers for the city while being reminded by our youth that a new day is coming, signified by Palm Sunday. Prayers from the youth will focus on healing and unity in this wonderful city of ours and include prayers to end violence, homelessness, racism and for city/state leadership, schools and first responders.

A re-enactment of Jesus riding a donkey similar to when he triumphantly rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday will take place and palms will be distributed to the community.



Colon Cancer Awareness Month: What You Need to Know About #2 Cancer Killer

By Thomas Abernathy, MD
Digestive Disease Associates

March is National Colon Cancer Awareness Month, an important time to talk about the second-leading cause of cancer-related death and yet one that many people feel uncomfortable discussing. Colon cancer can affect anyone, man or woman, and especially those ages 50 and above, so it's critical to understand your risks and what you can do to protect yourself.

This year alone, more than 95,000 Americans—including 2,400 in Maryland—will be diagnosed with colon cancer and more than 50,000 will die from the disease. While colon cancer does not discriminate, African Americans are more likely to die from the disease than any other group.

The good news is that colon cancer can be treated effectively when diagnosed early and even prevented. This is because colon cancers develop slowly, first showing up as a polyp—or non-cancerous growth—that can take years to become cancer. If these polyps are found early through routine screening and removed, doctors can effectively prevent cancer from ever forming. And with early diagnosis, the chances of surviving colon cancer are high.

The challenge is that many men and women aren't taking the proper precautions. Despite American Cancer Society guidelines that call for those at average risk to begin colon cancer screening at age 50, 23 million Americans in that age group don't follow through, increasing their risk of a late-stage diagnosis when treatment is difficult and survival rates are low.

There are a number of reasons why people avoid screening, including discomfort, embarrassment and even fear. Colonoscopy is the standard for colon cancer screening because doctors are able to detect cancerous and precancerous lesions, as well as remove them,



(Left) Dr. Thomas Abernathy (Right) Cologuard Test Kit, which offers patients an accurate, noninvasive screening option that they can take in the privacy of their own home. Cologuard looks for both blood and altered DNA from abnormal cells known to be associated with cancer and pre-cancerous polyps that are shed into the stool as it passes through the colon; this makes the test more accurate than other noninvasive options.

Courtesy Photos

during a single procedure. The problem is that some patients are unable or unwilling to undergo colonoscopy for medical or personal reasons.

For people looking for alternative screening options, there are noninvasive tests, such as fecal occult blood tests (FOBT) and fecal immunochemical tests (FIT). These tests look for blood in the stool that may be caused by a polyp or cancer. However, because there are unrelated conditions that can cause blood in the stool, and not all polyps or lesions actively bleed, these tests may not be reliable on their own for the detection of cancer or pre-cancerous polyps.

Another option approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) called Cologuard offers patients an accurate, noninvasive screening option that they can take in the privacy of their own home. What makes Cologuard different from other noninvasive colon cancer screening tests is that it looks for both



blood and altered DNA from abnormal cells known to be associated with cancer and pre-cancerous polyps that are shed into the stool as it passes through the colon; this makes the test more accurate than other noninvasive options.

The best part is that Cologuard requires no prep or dietary restrictions. The test is prescribed by a doctor and sent directly to the patient's home. After completing the collection process, the kit is sent back to the lab through a pre-paid mailer. If the test result is positive, the doctor will refer the patient for a diagnostic colonoscopy. If the result is negative, the patient should continue to participate in a screening program at an interval and with a method appropriate for the individual patient.

In a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Cologuard was highly sensitive in detecting colon cancer—in fact, it was able to detect 92 percent of cancers in average risk

patients with 87 percent specificity.

The bottom line is that colon cancer screening saves lives. The best test is one that gets done—so don't put it off any longer, March is the perfect time to call your doctor and check colon cancer screening off your to-do list.

To learn more about all of your screening options, contact the physicians at Digestive Disease Associates in Catonsville or Columbia at 410-247-7500.

Dr. Thomas Abernathy is a board certified gastroenterologist at Digestive Disease Associates and a diplomate of the American Board of Internal Medicine. He is also a member of the American Gastroenterology Association; the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy; the American College of Gastroenterology; the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and the National Medical Association.

The human body experiences a powerful gravitational pull in the direction of hope. That is why the patient's hopes are the physician's secret weapon. They are the hidden ingredients in any prescription. —Norman Cousins

Last Minute Tax Tips

(Family Features) Even though it's common knowledge that tax day is April 15 (April 18 for filing 2015 taxes in 2016), many people wait until the last minute to file their income taxes.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, 20-25 percent of Americans wait until the two weeks prior to the deadline to prepare their tax returns. To avoid scrambling as tax season draws to a close, here are some tips to help you prepare and file your taxes - even at the last minute.

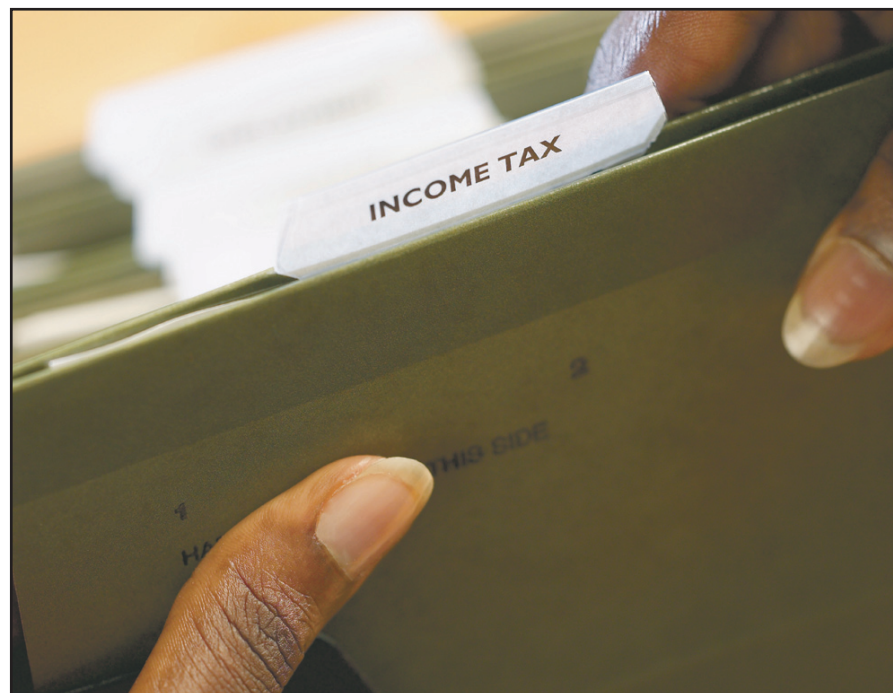
Get Organized

One of the biggest tax time hassles for many is getting the necessary documents together. To make preparing your taxes

go smoother, make sure you have the information you will need, including all of those forms that come in January, such as W-2s, 1099, mortgage interest statements, student loan statements and any receipts related to moving, medical bills or work expenses before you sit down to file your return.

Itemize Your Deductions

While it's easier to just take the standard deduction, you may be able to save more by itemizing - and it's worth the added work if your qualified expenses add up to more than the 2015 standard deduction for an individual (\$6,300) or married couple filing jointly (\$12,600). Many deductions are well-known, in-



cluding those for children, student loan or mortgage interest and charitable donations. However, there are other deductions available, such as job-related expenses, like work clothing and equipment, professional dues or business car expenses, that are deductible if the combined amount is more than 2 percent of your adjusted gross income, as well as medical expenses that exceed 10 percent of your adjusted gross income.

Get Help if You Need It

If you feel uncomfortable doing your taxes on your own, there are products and services available to help you file. You can speak with a tax professional to have them prepare your taxes or help you through the process, or use a computer program, which will help with everything from tracking deductions by answering simple questions, to selecting the correct forms for even the most complex returns while also allowing you to file electronically for a faster refund.

File Faster Online

Because the IRS processes electronic returns faster than mailed-in paper ones, there are several benefits that come with filing online, especially at the last

minute when time is precious. Since online returns are processed faster, that means you can expect a faster refund - the wait time is even less if you elect to have your refund deposited directly into your account. The IRS also checks electronically filed returns for completion and sends acknowledgement of receipt to put your mind at ease.

Consider Requesting an Extension

If you don't think you'll be able to finish your return on time, make sure to file for an extension using Form 4868 by April 18. Extensions are generally approved automatically and grant you a six-month extension to file. An extension to file, however, is not an extension to pay owed taxes, so paying your estimated balance due is imperative when it comes to

avoiding late-payment fees. If you're worried about paying what you owe, the IRS recommends filing your taxes or an extension and then setting up a payment plan.

No matter the reason for the delay in filing, getting prepared and taking advantage of available resources can help you beat the deadline and get best possible refund.



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ANNE ARUNDEL COMMUNITY COLLEGE REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS PROJECT NO. C2016-28-P OPEN END CONTRACT FOR ON-CALL GENERAL CONTRACTOR SERVICES

Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) is soliciting statement of qualifications from general contractors to be determined qualified by AACC to move on to the technical proposal phase for establishing a source of supply for an on-call agreement to provide construction-related services for projects/task orders under \$100,000.00. Types of services include, but not limited to carpentry, framing, drywall, masonry, flooring, ceilings, plumbing, paving repair, roof repair, general mechanical, and general electrical.

Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) will be accepted until 11 a.m. EST on April 12, 2016. SOQ documents may be obtained from the Purchasing office by contacting Heidi Frist, Senior Purchasing Agent, by e-mail: hmfrist@aacc.edu.

Notice of Nondiscrimination: AACC is an equal opportunity, affirmative action, Title IX, ADA Title 504 compliant institution. For information on AACC's compliance and complaints concerning sexual assault, sexual misconduct, discrimination or harassment, contact the federal compliance officer at 410-777-1239 or Maryland Relay 711.

Anne Arundel County/Annapolis Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

CERT is hosting two spring training classes with disaster simulation exercises. Volunteers, age 18 and up, are needed to play the role of "victims" in a simulated post-tornado scenario from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 9, 2016 and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 21, 2016. Volunteers may be lifted or asked to wear disaster-simulated makeup. It will not be quite like being on the set of "The Walking Dead" but close. This is an exciting and interesting volunteer event, which will help local responders in the event of a disaster. To volunteer, email training@aaacert.org to volunteer.

Meet the Candidates for Congressional District 4

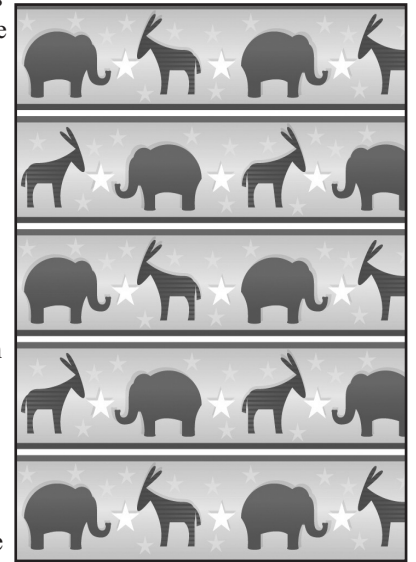
Arnold, Anne Arundel County— Candidates for the Maryland Congressional District 4 race will discuss their views on a variety of issues at a candidate's forum from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 23, 2016, in the Robert E. Kauffman Theater in the Pascal Center for Performing Arts at Anne Arundel Community College.

The forum is hosted and moderated by the AACC Center for the Study of Local Issues and the Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce. The three Republican candidates take the stage first, from 7 p.m. to 7:55 p.m. After a brief intermission, the six Democratic candidates will debate. Republican candidates attending are Robert Broadus, George E. McDermott and David Therrien. Democratic candidates attending are former Lt. Gov. Anthony G. Brown, J.D., retired Deputy Chief U.S. Marshal Matthew Fogg, former Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn Ivey, J.D., Del. Joseline Pena-Melnyk, J.D., Terence Strait and retired Army Lt. Col. Christopher Warren.

The Arnold campus is located at 101 College Parkway. The forum will be broadcast live on AACC TV and streamed via AACC's website, <http://www.aacc.edu/aacc-tv> Anne Arundel cable TV subscribers can see the debate on Channel 95 or 495 (high definition) with Broadstripe; Channel 95 or 995 (high definition) with Comcast; or Channel 35 with Verizon FiOS. It will be available on the college's YouTube channel the day after the event, <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheAacc-tv>

For information, call the CSLI at 410-777-2407 or 410-777-2733, email Chris Scanlon at cscanlon@aacc.edu or visit the website, <http://www.aacc.edu/csli/candidatesforum.cfm>

The primary election takes place on Tuesday, April 26. The general election takes place on Tuesday, November 8th.



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